

MARITAL INSTABILITY IN A MUNICIPALITY OF THE SOUTH OF ITALY

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to highlight the common and determining elements of marital instability in the first years of marriage in the municipality of Bari, for a comparison on a national level. More specifically, the objective was to verify whether the city of Bari shares the trend which is well established in the rest of Italy towards the so-called “lightening marriages”, by which is intended the interruption of the marriage in its first years. We started from the basic data formed by the time series of first marriages and separations according to the years in which the weddings took place. The separations examined here by means of longitudinal analysis involve cohorts of marriages formed in two five-year periods (the late 20th century, 1985-1989) and the beginning of the 21st century, 2001-2005) held to be of some significance in showing the modifications in the institution of marriage which took place over a period of more than twenty years. The analyses of the data provided interesting results. For example, it was observed that with the passage of time the comparison of the two five-year periods indicates that the consensual initiative is adopted by almost all the couples who decide to separate, because it is simpler, less expensive, and is concluded more quickly. There is also a marked tendency to separate in the first years of marriage and the type of marriage rites definitely does not have any influence on the way in which the marriage breaks own.

Keywords: Bari, marriage, instability

Introduction:

An essential perspective on the social changes taking place in Italy is represented by marital instability and the structural variations of its necessary prerequisite, marriage, which, while continuing to hold a dominant position, shows ever greater signs of change. The most important changes are surely the steady fall in the number of marriages and the higher average ages of the spouses at the time of marriage. Equally significant are the marked increase in civil marriages (in large part due to second marriages), the rapid increase of marital regimes based on the separation of property (Sacco G., 2010) and, finally, the increased number of marriages preceded by a period of cohabitation. At the same time there has been a constant growth of both separations and divorces. The instability of marriages and of family ties has become a central element of Italian social life, determining new forms of family aggregation that modify the course of life of the subjects directly or indirectly involved. In practical terms, this has significant results within the family and, as a result, in our society as a whole; this has led scholars to speak of “new models of cycles of family life” that take account of the diversity of families in the complexity of modern society.

There is no doubt that despite the strength of traditional ties, behaviour that was once considered marginal and circumscribed in Italian society, such as cohabitation prior to marriage, or births outside marriage, is now becoming increasingly common. A further confirmation of the ongoing transformation in the social system is the recent renewed

presentation to the Italian parliament of the bill on quick divorce.¹ Nevertheless, the socio-cultural customs and convictions are so deep-rooted that various studies have suggested the *partial emancipation* of Italian society, and the bill triggered bitter criticisms within the different political groups and drove some parliamentarians to express themselves in terms of a “trivialization” of marriage that will lead to the further disorientation of Italian society”. Those who make these criticisms overlook the predictability of the clash between the processes of change which also affect everyday life. Essentially, the behavioral changes indicate complex tensions and imbalances created by cultural discontinuity typical of complex modern societies. Among the elements listed in the introduction which lie behind these changes, separation and divorce attract great social attention because they significantly transform the lives of those who are involved. Divorce is an important indicator of the modification of the family, and a deeper understanding of it helps to clarify a number of basic aspects of the transformation of the family. Not only, but the break-up of marriage assumes considerable importance above all because of the complex social consequences for the family structure, for the children and for the dynamics of fecundity (De Sandre, Pinnelli, Santini, 1999). In reality, there is clearly a close connection between the instability of marital ties and the spread of “reconstituted” families in which at least one of the two spouses has been in a previous union. This gives rise to the relatively unprecedented situation of family ties in which the ties of affinity (through the assumption of “irregular” parental roles override the traditional ones of consanguinity. In addition, the reduced social control over sexual relations and interpersonal relations favours the growth of marital mobility, and makes it easier to form multiple relationships in the course of a single life cycle. All this facilitates the spread of diverse forms of broken traditional family ties which, in turn, leads to the so-called *pluralization* of the family.

2 – Trends in marital instability in the city of Bari

2.1 - Data, legislation and measures

As a result of complex cultural factors and different legislative models there is a very great variability in the break-up of marital unions in different times and places. Exact comparisons and estimates in time and space are especially difficult in the case of Italy where the law on divorce came into force in 1971, much later than in other European countries². A

¹ Ten years after its first presentation, the bill on quick divorce was re-proposed in May 2012. This measure, comprised of only two articles, reduces from three years to one the separation time of the couple (two years if there are children who are minors), and also envisages the dissolution of the community of property of the spouses once they have obtained authorization to live separately. However, at the time of writing, the bill has still not been discussed by Parliament. The reasons supporting the necessity of quick divorce are to be found both in the exhausting legal delays and the excessive costs involved in bringing to an end marital life. Data provided by the AMI (*Avvocati matrimonialisti italiani* – Italian Matrimonial Lawyers) suggest that this is leading to new behavior patterns, with a reduction in the number of separations and, even more so, of divorces. This is not a result a growing disaffection with separation, but rather is the effect of the above mentioned considerations in support of quick divorce. These new tendencies are reflected in a greater number of couples who continue to live separately in the same home or who go abroad (to Rumania, Spain or France) where the costs of separation are significantly lower.

² It is worth recalling that one of the reasons for requesting divorce foreseen in article 3 of the divorce law, is the requirement that there has been a *legal separation* for at least three years before a divorce can be obtained. This period was five years in law n° 898/1970, and this was reduced to three with the introduction of law n° 74 of 6 March 1987, which also foresees, in the case of agreement between both parties, a simplified procedure similar to that of separation by mutual consent. It should, in fact, also be recalled that Italian law foresees two forms of separation: consensual and judicial. The former is based on an agreement between the spouses which establishes all the terms regarding custody of the children, any alimony payments, the division of property etc. To be legally valid, this agreement must be approved by a judge. Judicial separation, on the other hand, is a true legal procedure which is promoted on the request of one of the two spouses. There follows a hearing and the

further difficulty is the scholars to speak of an “Italian model” (Andersson G., 2002; Zanatta A.L., 2003; Sapio A., 2010).

This particular character is due not only to Italy’s unusual judicial system with relation to divorce in comparison with the other European countries³, but also to the wide variations that exist over the national territory⁴. This justifies an particular situation in Italy which only in some aspects resembles that of other European countries, so as to lead some ever growing number of *ad hoc* studies examining the phenomenon on a territorial level so as to understand better the causes and consequences.

Quantitative information can effectively permit new interpretive paradigms of family instability that predict differences of geography and the evolution of the population, confirming that there are many factors that influence the demography of a country. In fact, all the processes of transformation, with their own historical and social characteristics, are linked to realities influenced by particular local characteristics. In order to understand social phenomena, and make correct comparisons on a territorial level, it is, therefore, necessary to highlight their common and determining elements.

This brief general introduction provides a necessary background before directing our attention towards the central concern of this work - marital instability in the city of Bari ⁵ in the first years of marriage. We have considered the first years of marriage in order to verify whether the city of Bari shares the trend which is now well established in the rest of the country towards so-called “lightening marriages” ⁶, the interruption of matrimony in the first years. We began from the basic data formed by the time series of first marriages and separations according to the years in which the weddings took place, the spouses’ ages and other variables for the creation of an essential reading framework, on a micro level, as a point of reference for further studies. In completing this research we decided it was more correct to employ the data on separations and not on divorces: there were three reasons for this:

- 1) from ancient and Roman law, through intermediate law to that of the modern day, marriage and its break down have always been a subject of legislation in Italy, but legal separation has less impact on the well-established beliefs of the local cultural fabric; for this reason the population studied here is heterogeneous *a priori*, with also that part of the population

pronouncement of the sentence of separation. The legal procedure can be transformed into a consensual one at any time if the parties agree.

³ This involves, in effect, a **two-stage process** (first it is necessary to legally separate and then, after an interval, the divorce can be completed) cf. Saraceno-Naldini, 2013.

⁴ The propensity to interrupt marital units grew steadily from the mid-1990s onwards: at that time there was a variation between the minimal level of 198.6 separations per thousand marriages in the south and the maximum observed in the north-west with 374.9 separations per thousand marriages. In 2009, compared to 1995, there had been an increase of 64%, and the number of divorces had almost doubled. Observed in a context in which there has been a falling number of marriages, these increases confirm the effective increased propensity to break up marital unions. Cf. Istat, 2012, *Il matrimonio in Italia*, Statistiche report.

⁵ The data used in this work were taken from the Offices of the Demographic, Electoral and Statistical Department of the Municipality of Bari. The authors sincerely thank the Director of the Department Dr. U. Ravallese and the department official Dr. C. Di Cosmo, who kindly assisted the collection of data. It was thought essential to utilize municipal data because they take account of a number of variables not considered in the data held in the court records. The data relating to separations held by the Municipality and the Courts are the same, since on the basis of DPR 396/2000, art. 69, of the Civil Status Regulations and, even earlier on the basis of the Royal Decree of 1939 n. 1238 of the Civil Status Ordinance, the information contained in marriage documents (original copies of which are held both by the Municipality and by the Prefecture) must include separations and divorces. Unfortunately, however, comparison of some of the variables in the two five-year periods has not been possible because, with the introduction of various regulations on privacy, since 2000 much personal information has no longer been included in the marriage registers.

⁶ ISTAT, 2013, *Separazioni e divorzi*.

opposed to divorce being well represented. This is important in the case of a Catholic country like Italy;

- 2) legal separation is a necessary prerequisite for divorce in Italy, and in the vast majority of cases sanctions the definitive break-up of the marriage: in reality, divorce has never substituted legal separation, but has been added to it;
- 3) legal separation in Italy is statistically the event most closely connected to the breakdown of conjugal unions.⁷

The separations, examined here by means of longitudinal analysis involve cohorts of marriages formed in two five-year periods (the late 20th century, 1985-1989) and the beginning of the 21st century, 2001-2005) for the modifications occurring over a period of more than twenty years which has seen significant change. In addition, the representative nature of the two five-year periods lies in their being at the borderline between two epochs of fundamental importance in showing new and old demographic trends.

2.2 – *The measures of intensity and frequency*

In general, the term longitudinal analyses is used when the study of demographic phenomena is carried out according to events that effect the same cohort. The comparison between measurements of intensity and frequency of a specific phenomenon, referred to different cohorts, make it possible to interpret the individual and social changes occurring between different generations. Our perspective will be to observe the change which has occurred between different generations, in the context of the phenomenon we are studying in this work. Without presuming to be able to understand “everything”, we seek to explain in part the great contextual and temporal variability, which is extremely relevant in influencing social behavior. In Demography, “separation”, understood as the end of a *single* marital experience, is part of processes of “unrepeatable events”, since the rare cases in which a legal separation is followed by a reconciliation and then another legal separation of the same spouses are statistically irrelevant. Therefore, the separation event, having its origin in a marriage within a cohort formed in a given time interval, must be considered non-renewable. The most suitable instrument to describe the phenomenon in question, and above all to obtain the two fundamental parameters of intensity and frequency is the decrement table in ongoing or *retrospective observation*. We are well aware that in the case of any process of non-repeatable events, the construction of an decrement table requires the determination of the probability of experiencing the event studied. In view of the impossibility, in our case, of knowing both the number of surviving marriages and, above all, the disruptive phenomena (mortality and/or migration of spouses) at the various duration times, so as to be able to construct the risk of experiencing the event and to obtain the decrement table, the determination of the two fundamental phenomena is entrusted to the theory of *reduced events* (Santini, 1992) approximately dividing the separations by duration to the *initial contingent*. With this approximation, the updating of the first marriages to the subsequent duration times and the calculation of losses due to death and emigration are not taken into account, but a measure of under-reckoned erroneous intensity is accepted which increases with lengthening duration. However, before proceeding to the construction of the measures of intensity and frequency, it is first necessary to describe the situation on the basis of measurements which mark the marital instability. From the data in Tab.1 two quite different pictures emerge for the marriage cohorts in the two periods considered. In the first period the number of marriages celebrated is almost always stable, with the exception of some oscillations, which from the three year duration are accompanied by a clear, though always

⁷ 99.2% of divorces in 2009 were preceded by a legal separation with the exception of the other cases foreseen by art. 3 of law 898/1970: penal conviction, rectification of sexual attribution, unconsummated marriage, etc. id., ISTAT, op. cit.

irregular, trend of increasing separations. In the second period (2001-2005), however, there is a marked reduction both in the number of marriages celebrated in the cohorts considered and in comparison with the cohorts of the first period (1985-1989).

Tab. 1 – Marriages celebrated and separations according to duration (a.v.). Cohorts 1985-1989 and 2001-2005

| Marriage cohorts | Marriages celebrated | Duration | | | | |
|------------------|----------------------|----------|----|----|----|----|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1985-1989 | | | | | | |
| 1985 | 2,407 | | | | 2 | 4 |
| 1986 | 2,414 | 1 | | 3 | 10 | 8 |
| 1987 | 2,513 | | | 4 | 8 | 12 |
| 1988 | 2,441 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 7 | 14 |
| 1989 | 2,467 | 7 | 7 | 13 | 8 | 4 |
| 2001-2005 | | | | | | |
| 2001 | 1,939 | 6 | 21 | 19 | 22 | 12 |
| 2002 | 1,781 | 6 | 25 | 24 | 14 | 12 |
| 2003 | 1,714 | 1 | 12 | 12 | 24 | 25 |
| 2004 | 1,584 | 6 | 18 | 11 | 15 | 20 |
| 2005 | 1,697 | 5 | 14 | 22 | 24 | 16 |

As previously stated, in order to analyse marital instability in the marriage cohorts observed, hypothesizing zero mortality and a closed population, we calculated the *reduced events*, in this case the estimated probability of separation (De Santis, 2010) at the different duration times for the initial number of marriages celebrated in the different cohorts⁸. The common trend shared by the different marriage cohorts in the two periods considered is the progressive increase of total intensity at separation.

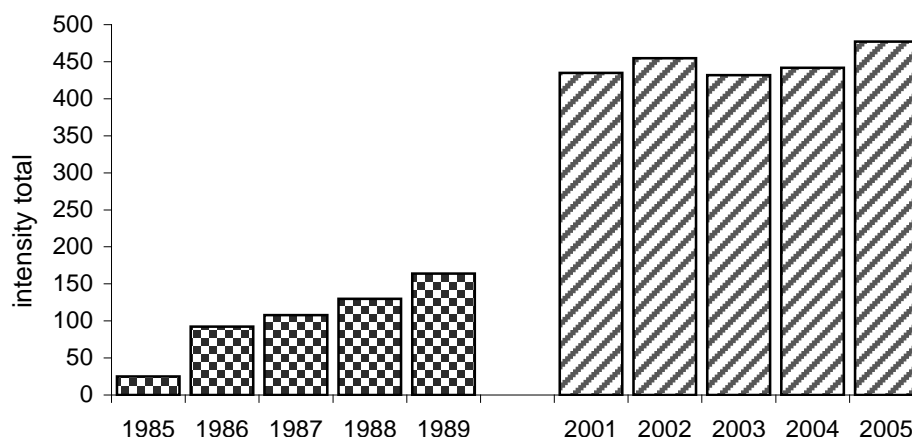
In reality, however, we observe that, passing from the marriage cohort of 1985 to that of 1989, the intensity of separation in the first years of marriage increased by 534.9%, while in the second period, comparing the marriage cohorts of 2001 and 2005, the increase was of 15.7%.

Tab. 2 – Probability of separation according to duration (‰ marriages celebrated). Cohorts 1985-1989 and 2001-2005

| Marriage cohorts | Duration | | | | | Total Intensity |
|------------------|----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 1985-1989 | | | | | | |
| 1985 | | | | 0.83 | 1.66 | 2.49 |
| 1986 | 0.41 | | 1.24 | 4.14 | 3.31 | 9.10 |
| 1987 | | | 1.59 | 3.18 | 4.77 | 9.54 |
| 1988 | 1.23 | 2.05 | 1.23 | 2.87 | 5.73 | 13.11 |
| 1989 | 2.84 | 2.84 | 5.27 | 3.24 | 1.62 | 15.81 |
| 2001-2005 | | | | | | |
| 2001 | 3.09 | 10.83 | 9.80 | 11.35 | 6.19 | 41.26 |
| 2002 | 3.37 | 14.04 | 13.48 | 7.86 | 6.74 | 45.49 |
| 2003 | 0.58 | 7.00 | 7.00 | 14.00 | 14.59 | 43.17 |
| 2004 | 3.79 | 11.36 | 6.94 | 9.47 | 12.63 | 44.19 |
| 2005 | 2.95 | 8.25 | 12.96 | 14.14 | 9.43 | 47.73 |

⁸The duration of marriage was obtained indirectly from the difference between year of separation and year of marriage.

Fig.1 –Probability of separation according to duration (% marriages celebrated)
Cohorts 1985-1989/2001-2005



This means that the risk of separation is higher in the second period (values greater than 40%) while the increase is more rapid in the first period (Tab.2 and Fig.1). This suggests that Bari shares the trend seen in the whole country, of a clear tendency to break up marital unions sooner with respect to the duration of marriages, gradually as the more recently formed cohorts are considered.

Further confirmation of this is revealed by the average duration of marriages at the time of separation, which is more and more reduced among the marriage cohorts observed (cf. Tab.3).

Tab. 3 – Average duration of marriage at the time of separation. Cohorts 1985-1989 and 2001-2005

| Marriage cohorts 1985-1989 | Mean duration | Marriage cohorts 2001-2005 | Mean duration |
|-------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------|---------------|
| 1985 | 4.7 | 2001 | 3.2 |
| 1986 | 4.1 | 2002 | 3.0 |
| 1987 | 4.3 | 2003 | 3.9 |
| 1988 | 3.8 | 2004 | 3.3 |
| 1989 | 3.8 | 2005 | 3.5 |

With the availability of data not only on the distribution of marriages according to the marital status of the husband and wife, but also on the distribution of the separations, it was possible to calculate the mean ages of both the husband and wife at the time and of marriage and of separation.

In the cohorts of the first period as a whole (1985-1989) the mean age of the husbands at the time of marriage was around 29, a figure which rises to 33 in the second period (2001-2005). In the case of the wives, too, the mean age at the time of marriage rises between the first and second periods, passing from 26 to 29. (Tab.4).

Tab. 4 – Mean age at marriage and at separation. Cohorts 1985-1989 and 2001-2005

| Marriage cohorts | Mean age at marriage | | Mean age at separation | |
|------------------|----------------------|-------|------------------------|-------|
| | Husbands | Wives | husbands | wives |
| 1985-1989 | 29.0 | 26.0 | 33.0 | 30.0 |
| 1985 | 28.5 | 25.3 | 35.3 | 31.9 |
| 1986 | 30.1 | 26.0 | 34.2 | 29.8 |
| 1987 | 28.2 | 24.6 | 33.0 | 30.6 |
| 1988 | 28.7 | 25.4 | 31.4 | 30.1 |
| 1989 | 30.5 | 27.0 | 33.2 | 30.2 |
| 2001-2005 | 33.0 | 29.0 | 36.0 | 33.0 |
| 2001 | 30.2 | 29.4 | 33.9 | 31.5 |
| 2002 | 30.5 | 27.5 | 34.6 | 30.7 |
| 2003 | 34.1 | 30.2 | 37.2 | 34.6 |
| 2004 | 35.4 | 28.3 | 37.8 | 31.5 |
| 2005 | 33.2 | 29.3 | 36.1 | 32.9 |

The observed increase in the mean age at marriage in the two periods examined is reflected in the separations. In both periods there is an increase of around three years in the mean age of both husbands and wives at the time of separation. In the case of the husbands the mean age at separation passes from 33 years recorded for the cohorts in the first period to around 36 years in the second, while for the wives, in the same cohorts and in the same periods, the mean separations come at 30 and 33 years old.

3 - A brief look at the marriage cohorts

Another interesting aspect emerges from the data relating to the distribution of separations according to the type of marriage rites (Tabs. 5-6). Above all, it is seen that separations are more frequent in marriages celebrated in a religious ceremony with civil effects (marriage with civil recognition): on average these accounted for around 74% of the separations occurring in marriages of the period 1985-1989 and 76% of those in the second period (Tab. 5).

Tab. 5 – % distribution of separations according to marriage rites.
Cohorts 1985-1989 and 2001-2005

| Marriage cohorts | Rites | | Total |
|------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| | Religious | Civil | |
| 1985-1989 | 74.1 | 23.7 | 100.0 |
| 1985 | 83.3 | 16.7 | 100.0 |
| 1986 | 72.7 | 27.3 | 100.0 |
| 1987 | 66.7 | 22.3 | 100.0 |
| 1988 | 81.3 | 18.7 | 100.0 |
| 1989 | 66.7 | 33.3 | 100.0 |
| 2001-2005 | 76.0 | 24.0 | 100.0 |
| 2001 | 84.0 | 16.0 | 100.0 |
| 2002 | 82.0 | 18.0 | 100.0 |
| 2003 | 76.0 | 24.0 | 100.0 |
| 2004 | 69.3 | 30.7 | 100.0 |
| 2005 | 67.9 | 32.1 | 100.0 |

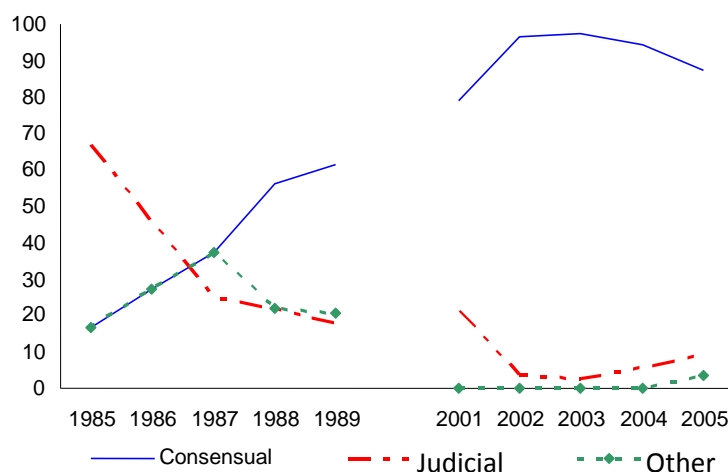
The trend of separations in the most recent group of cohorts (2001-2005) is fairly regular (cf.Tab.5). In fact we note a progressive fall in the separations occurring in marriages celebrated with religious rites as we pass from the marriage cohorts of 2001 (84.0%) to those of 2005 (67.9%), with a respective increase in the proportion of civil marriages. The same trend was present, though in a less regular form, also in the cohorts of 1985-1989. It should be pointed out that this higher frequency of separations in religious marriages may derive from the persisting greater number of unions formed with religious rites: in the collective studied, these are close to 90% in the marriage cohorts of 1985-1989 and are more than 82% in the cohorts of 2001-2005 (cf.Tab. 6). The Chi-Square test values⁹ (Tab. 6) confirm, moreover, that in both groups of cohorts the same outcome of the marriage is statistically differentiated according to the type of rites; however, this difference is contrary to what was suggested by the simple distribution by year of the separations since, among the marriages contracted with religious rites, there was a less frequent recourse to separation compared to marriages contracted with civil rites: less than 1% compared to around 3% in the first cohort and 4% in the second.

⁹ Although in the present case the relations being used are within a collective and not a sample, the use of the Chi-Square test or other inferential tests of a similar type (such as Cramer's V) is justified by two groups of factors: the necessity to identify the orderliness of the relations and the understanding that the cohorts examined are in reality sub-populations, both in temporal terms and, even more so, in territorial terms. In fact, the results obtained here could probably be extended to the territorial context in which the city of Bari stands (its metropolitan area or the entire province).

Tab. 6 – %distribution of marriages according to marriage rites by outcome at a distance of 5 years
Complex of cohorts 1985-1989 and 2001-2005

| Outcome at a distance of 5 years | Rites | | | Test χ^2 |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|-------|-------|---------------|
| | Religious | Civil | Total | |
| | Marriage cohorts 1985-89 | | | p<0.000001 |
| Separations | 0.8 | 2.8 | 1.0 | |
| Surviving marriages | 99.2 | 97.2 | 99.0 | |
| Total marriages | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |
| Complex of marriages | 89.9 | 10.1 | 100.0 | |
| | Marriage cohorts 2001-2005 | | | p<0.000001 |
| Separations | 4.1 | 6.0 | 4.4 | |
| Surviving marriages | 95.9 | 94.0 | 95.6 | |
| Total marriages | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |
| Complex of marriages | 82.3 | 17.7 | 100.0 | |

A further distinctive element of the observed marriage cohorts, in the two time intervals compared, is the type of separation procedure chosen by the spouses. In the cohorts of both five-year periods the preference is for the consensual separation procedure, but this preference is much stronger in those of 2001-2005 compared to those of 1985 - 89 (Fig.2).

Fig. 2 – % Distribution of separations according to type of cohorts. Cohorts 1985-1989 and 2001-2005

In order to verify whether there is a relationship between the marriage rites and the form of separation, for each group of cohorts we employed Cramer's V index¹⁰, which indicated the absence of any association between the variables analysed for both groups, even though in the first period the index assumed an interesting (but not statistically significant) value.

Tab.7 – % Distribution of separations according to the type of procedure, by matrimonial rites
Complex of the cohorts 1985-1989 and 2001-2005

| Complex of the cohorts 1985-1989 and 2001-2005 | | | | |
|--|-----------|-------|---------|-----------------|
| Type of procedure | Rites | | | V Cramér |
| | Religious | Civil | Overall | |
| Cohorts 1985-89 | | | | 0-201 (p=0.084) |
| Consensual | 48.3 | 44.1 | 47.2 | |
| Judicial | 31.5 | 17.6 | 27.6 | |
| Other * | 20.2 | 38.2 | 25.2 | |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |
| Cohorts 2001-2005 | | | | |
| Consensual | 91.8 | 88.0 | 90.9 | |

¹⁰ This contingency index measures the intensity of the relationship between two non-quantitative variables, when this is statistically significant, and varies between 0 and 1.

| | | | | |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-----------------|
| Judicial | 7.5 | 10.9 | 8.3 | 0.056 (p=0.541) |
| Other * | 0.7 | 1.1 | 0.8 | |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |
| * Other = foreign sentence or non-transcribed | | | | |

Also in the case of the individual marriage cohorts, the application of the index reveals p-value levels that are always greater than 0.05, thus indicating an absence of association between the two variables (Tab. 8). In other terms, *the type of rites with which the marriage is celebrated do not have any influence on the way in which the marriage breaks down*. Nevertheless, there was a strong and systematic reduction in the recourse to the judicial separation process from the time of the first cohorts, and this reached very low levels in the final cohorts considered. The basic reason for this was the time which the judicial process involves. In fact, in the consensual process it is not necessary to prove “the prerequisite of the intolerability of continuing cohabitation” and any argument can be advanced as a valid reason for separation, provided it is approved by a judge. There is, therefore, a considerable *consensuality*, which with the passage of time is gathering ever more favour. Obviously, this can be attributed to the so-called “generational effects” highlighted by the cultural formation received in the particular context in which one grows up. In reality, the phenomenon in question, together with nuptiality, results from decisions that take account of the *conditions of the time*¹¹ and, therefore, are more influenced by external factors. The changes in the last cohorts are actually due to new ways of viewing the relations between men and women, and between members of the family. The attempt to interpret the generational transformation observed in the two groups of cohorts examined is rather complex, not only because, as we have already said, the “cultural epochs” lived by the individual generations change, but above all because of the multitude of factors determining the separation. The transformation of the degree of legitimization of divorce is essentially founded in the different tensions within the couple which in turn modify the motivations for the request to separate. The result of this, in our opinion, is that the problem will remain “always open”. It seems safe to suggest that the hypothesis of *the structural effect*¹² can find broad consensus both within the institution of marriage and in separations. Because they originate from the will of the persons involved, these are essentially private acts, but due to the continuous evolution of the perception of social values, they are in reality influenced by the historical and cultural context of the society to which the individuals belong. The demographic study of these phenomena interprets well the direction of generational transitions and passages through “the socio-historical transformations which are reflected in the way the different cohorts develop their own life strategies and pass from one age to another defining the borderline between the ages, and the characteristics of the different cohorts can in turn produce social transformations” (Ryder, 1965). To sum up, historical, political and value system conditioning is what really counts in the reality of things.

¹¹ G.C. Blangiardo, *Elementi di Demografia*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2012.

¹² We refer to one of the principle findings of the demographer and sociologist E. Durkheim regarding the relationship between *individual and aggregate characteristics*. Durkheim’s research, initially concerned with suicide, led him to affirm the fundamental importance of the so-called *structural effect* of the group to which one belongs, which is able to modify individual tendencies to certain behaviour (*The Rules of Sociological Method*, 1895). This is more the case in dealing with a socio-cultural phenomenon that is not expressed only in “evolving data”, but is also strongly influenced by economic fluctuations of a short term character.

Tab.8– %Distribution of separations according to type of procedure and rites.
Cohorts 1985-1989 and 2001-2005

| Marriage cohorts | Type of procedure | Rites | | | Cramér V |
|------------------|-------------------|-----------|--------|---------|--------------------|
| | | Religious | Civil | Overall | |
| 1985 | Consensual | 20.0 | - | 16.6 | 0.316 ($p=0.74$) |
| | Judicial | 60.0 | 100.0 | 66.7 | |
| | Other * | 20.0 | - | 16.7 | |
| | Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |
| 1986 | Consensual | 25.0 | 33.3 | 27.2 | 0.380 ($p=0.20$) |
| | Judicial | 56.2 | 16.7 | 45.5 | |
| | Other * | 18.8 | 50.0 | 27.3 | |
| | Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |
| 1987 | Consensual | 43.8 | 25.0 | 37.5 | 0.204 ($p=0.61$) |
| | Judicial | 25.0 | 25.0 | 25.0 | |
| | Other * | 31.2 | 50.0 | 37.5 | |
| | Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |
| 1988 | Consensual | 53.8 | 66.7 | 56.2 | 0.262 ($p=0.33$) |
| | Judicial | 26.9 | - | 21.9 | |
| | Other * | 19.3 | 33.3 | 21.9 | |
| | Total | 100.0 | 100.0% | 100.0 | |
| 1989 | Consensual | 65.4 | 53.8 | 61.6 | 0.180 ($p=0.53$) |
| | Judicial | 19.2 | 15.4 | 17.9 | |
| | Other * | 15.4 | 30.8 | 20.5 | |
| | Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |
| 2001 | Consensual | 79.1 | 76.9 | 78.8 | 0.060 ($p=0.86$) |
| | Judicial | 20.9 | 23.1 | 21.2 | |
| | Other * | - | - | - | |
| | Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |
| 2002 | Consensual | 95.6 | 100.0 | 96.3 | 0.086 ($p=0.44$) |
| | Judicial | 4.4 | - | 3.7 | |
| | Other * | - | - | - | |
| | Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |
| 2003 | Consensual | 98.2 | 94.4 | 97.3 | 0.101 ($p=0.38$) |
| | Judicial | 1.8 | 5.6 | 2.7 | |
| | Other * | - | - | - | |
| | Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |
| 2004 | Consensual | 95.7 | 91.3 | 94.2 | 0.088 ($p=0.47$) |
| | Judicial | 4.3 | 8.7 | 5.8 | |
| | Other * | - | - | - | |
| | Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |
| 2005 | Consensual | 92.9 | 80.0 | 88.9 | 0.220 ($p=0.14$) |
| | Judicial | 3.6 | 16.0 | 7.4 | |
| | Other * | 3.5 | 4.0 | 3.7 | |
| | Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

* Other = foreign sentence or non-transcribed

4- CONCLUSION

Marital separation is certainly no longer a rare event, but is a widespread phenomenon that potentially involves an ever growing number of couples. It surely represents a profound transformation of social customs that induces notable changes in society. The essential passages in analysing the quantitative dynamics of marriages celebrated in the city of Bari and of separations during the periods examined have shown that also in Bari marriages are in steady decline while there is a marked increase in separations, as is the case in the whole country.¹³ There appears to be a distinct trend to separate sooner in the first years of marriage. The religious ceremony is still the preferred choice despite the significant increase of civil

¹³ Source Istat, *Annuario statistico* 2012.

marriages that is one of the clearest aspects of the transformations taking place in marriage. Finally, interesting results were obtained from the observation of data concerning separations. In fact, with the passage of time, the comparison of both five-year periods shows how the consensual typology is adopted by almost all spouses who decide to separate, because it is easier, less expensive and is concluded in a short time. When couples split up, therefore, it is no longer the fault of one of the parties, but is the outcome of mutual intolerance already in the early years of marriage, and it emerges without there being even the time to arrive at the classical crisis of the “seven-year itch”.

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